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TAGS: PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: SENIOR DAWA OFFICIAL ON LTSR, SADRIST "GHOSTS,"
AND ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

I1. (C) Summary: Senior Dawa Party CoR member Haidar al-Abadi told us January 27 that CoR ratification of any long-term strategic relationship (LTSR) agreement will likely turn on provisions governing legal immunity and the U.S. military's ability to arrest and detain Iraqi citizens. He claimed the "mood of the country" had changed over the past year and that most Iraqis do not want foreign troops in Iraq. Characterizing Sadrists Trend officials and CoR members as "ghosts" who operate in constant fear of attracting Moqtada al-Sadr's ire, he said the Trend is in decline but still highly dangerous. The affable UK-educated economist said his "gut feeling" indicates Moqtada will extend his militia freeze order beyond its scheduled late-February expiration, and claimed that Sadr receives funding from the governments of Iran and (somewhat less probably) Saudi Arabia. Insisting that Dawa's electoral prospects will benefit greatly from the increased popularity of Maliki and his government, Abadi said Dawa is currently considering whether to enter into alliances in upcoming provincial elections. He expressed serious doubt about Sunni sincerity toward national reconciliation, and predicted the Kurds would stall CoR passage of a hydrocarbons bill while they created "facts on the ground" with new oil and gas production pursuant to unilateral agreements with foreign companies. He urged greater USG focus on moving displaced families back into their own homes, stating that the window of opportunity for re-settlement is brief and failure to address the issue will create problems for generations to come. End Summary.

Get LTSR Right Or Get Out

I2. (C) Abadi emphasized that CoR approval of any bilateral security agreement will depend on several key issues: legal immunity for American personnel, and the U.S. military's ability to arrest and detain Iraqi citizens. For example, while he does not expect the USG to allow Iraqi courts to try American soldiers in cases involving the death of Iraqi citizens, Abadi will insist that each such case be accounted for under a "transparent American legal process" that could be attended by GOI representatives. Similarly, he said he will be looking for U.S. military arrest/detention procedures that require detainee handover to the GOI within a fixed and relatively brief period of time. Relating that Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has called the LTSR negotiation a "national issue" around which Shia, Sunnis and Kurds must join together, Abadi said the "mood of the country" had changed over the past year and that most Iraqis no longer want foreign troops in Iraq. Abadi urged the USG to understand that "national pride" is at stake for Iraqis, adding that we should be mindful that each GOI official who will negotiate the agreement and every single CoR member who will consider ratification has already endured at least one "humiliation" at checkpoints manned by U.S. soldiers. If you don't get key LTSR details right, he cautioned, "even the

Kurds will not support you being here."

Sadists In Decline But Deadly

¶3. (C) Abadi claimed Sadr Trend popularity has plunged in the past year for three main reasons. First, Iraq's Shia were appalled by the August 2007 Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) attack on sacred Shia shrines in Karbala during an important religious festival. Second, a steep reduction of Sunni-Shia carnage and the British pullback in Basrah have deprived the Trend of favorite rabble-rousing issues over which they once postured as protectors of Shia masses. Third, Sadrists CoR members and officials are ineffective when operating within the political process because they have little or no authority to act or speak on the Trend's behalf, and are terrified of missteps that might attract Sadr's ire and result in their death. Abadi laughingly referred to Sadrists CoR colleagues as "ghosts" who are prone to frequent 180 degree position shifts due to conflicting instructions from Sadr and his top lieutenants, adding that the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) CoR coalition is very happy the Sadists withdrew from UIA ranks in October 2007.

¶4. (C) He said Moqtada's leadership style depends almost entirely on his ability to create fear within his organization and among the Iraqi public. Echoing concerns we have heard from senior ISCI sources, Abadi asserted that Sadr's religious study in Qom may confer on him a cloak of new-found religious legitimacy and authority among the Shia masses and thus increase the Sadr threat. Moqtada is also successful in casting competition with other Shia organizations such as ISCI and Dawa as a class struggle between his impoverished followers and ISCI/Dawa elites.

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Abadi says he cautioned fellow Dawa member Prime Minister Maliki to be careful in GOI crackdowns on Sadrists in south-central Iraq in order to take this issue away from the Sadrists. Abadi's "gut feeling" tells him Moqtada will extend his JAM freeze order beyond its scheduled late-February expiration, but only if he feels firmly in control of the organization. Abadi claimed Sadr receives funding from the Saudi and Iranian governments, but believes Tehran decided to rein in Moqtada last year after unrelated requests by Maliki, who complained about the impact of JAM operations on Iraq's security, and ISCI, which complained about JAM assassination of ISCI/Badr southern provincial governors. Abadi asserted that Tehran wants the U.S. to stay in Iraq "in order to make you weak and keep you distracted."

Provincial Elections

¶5. (C) Claiming that the Maliki government has grown markedly in strength and public popularity over the past six months, Abadi predicted the Dawa Party would reap the benefits in upcoming but unscheduled provincial elections. He said Dawa would take up the issue of electoral coalition formation on a province-by-province basis, adding that some sort of broad Shia alliance in Baghdad is likely. He ruled out an electoral partnership with the Sadr Trend, and prognosticated that the Sadrists are headed for a dismal showing on election day, even in Sadr City ("but only if there are free and fair elections, if not free and fair anything is possible"). He divulged that ISCI officials had voiced concerns to Dawa about Sadrist shenanigans within the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and proposed the two parties work together to either clean out the IHEC or form some sort of new commission. Abadi said Dawa has yet to conclude the IHEC is incapable of delivering a free and fair election and is studying the issue, adding that he told ISCI officials to keep their concerns about IHEC out of the media for fear that the Iraqi public may lose confidence in elections based on preliminary claims that may later be found

to have no merit. He said Dawa will press for an open-list electoral system.

Worried About IDPs, Skeptical of Sunni and Kurdish Agendas

¶ 6. (C) Chairman of the CoR Economic Committee, Abadi urged greater USG focus on moving displaced families back into their own homes, stating that the window of opportunity for re-settlement is brief and failure to address this issue now - when proof of home ownership and property value is still readily available - will make future resolution almost impossible, thus creating social tension and hatred that will persist for generations to come. He expressed serious doubt about Sunni sincerity toward national reconciliation and the true aim of "Awakening" movements (he distinguished between "sincere" Anbar tribal movements and "opportunistic and Baathist ideological" movements such as the Islamic Army), but said his committee was working closely with the GOI on programs to employ or train Awakening members so that they would be absorbed into mainstream Iraqi society and "given hope for the future." Abadi predicted the Kurds would delay CoR passage of a hydrocarbons bill while Masoud Barzani creates "facts on the ground" with new oil and gas production pursuant to unilateral agreements with foreign companies, and groused that the Kurds lose no opportunity to weaken the central government to strengthen their own interests.

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